

## Futility of Life Under the Sun Ecclesiastes 1:1-18

### Background Notes

### Doctrinal Points

1. Under the sun, the cycles of life lead to futility.
  
2. Under the sun, human wisdom and knowledge lead to futility.

### Practical Application

1. Set your mind on things above the sun!

### Questions

1. Who wrote the book of Ecclesiastes? When was it written?
  
2. Why is this book given the name Ecclesiastes?
  
3. What phrase is the key to understanding the contents of this book of Scripture? What is the meaning of this phrase?
  
4. How does the author of Ecclesiastes describe the cycles of life (vs 4-11)? What is his conclusion regarding these cycles?
  
5. What does the author recognize as the one source of the real meaning of life (vs 13-18)?

## Answers

1. We believe King Solomon wrote the book of Ecclesiastes. Verse 1 says that the writer was the son of David, king of Jerusalem. We believe that he wrote this book of Scripture near the end of his life after he had come back to the Lord (mid-10th century B.C.). References to Solomon's unrivaled wisdom (v 1:16), wealth (2:7) and extensive building activities (2:4-6) as well as Jewish and Christian tradition all point to Solomon as the author.
2. The title of this book follows the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, and comes from the word in verse 1, preacher or teacher or assembler, that is, one who speaks to assemblies of people. The closeness of Ecclesiastes to the Greek word "ecclesia", the word for assembly or church, is recognizable.
3. The key to understanding this book of Scripture is the phrase "under the sun." This is a figure of speech that is used 29 times in the book and means, from the human perspective, not taking God into account, who is "above the sun." By the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Solomon had it right. Under the sun, without divine revelation, there is no meaning to life. All is vanity, futile and meaningless.
4. Solomon describes the cycles of life in terms of the passing of generations (v 4), the rising and setting of the sun each day (v 5), the seasonal cycles of the wind (v 6), and the water and water-vapor cycles of the atmosphere replenishing the rivers and seas (v7). Solomon sees these cycles as endless and meaningless, with "nothing new" coming from them (v 10), even a lack of remembering and learning from the cycles and certainly no progress in them (v 11).
5. Solomon realized that even with all his human wisdom and knowledge, he could not figure out the real meaning of life. He recognized that apart from divine revelation, the search for the meaning of life leads to a lifelong struggle of futility (v 14), madness and folly (v 17).

## Discuss / Consider

1. As believers we constantly face the demands and temptations of this world. Discuss the means that you have to withstand those pressures so that you might keep your priorities set on serving Christ and being a witness for Him in all you do. Consider specific Bible verses that give practical guidance in this area.

## Challenge

1. Are your thoughts, activities and priorities of life focused on the things of this world? Are you expending lots of effort and energy and not seeing any positive results? Take seriously the biblical guidance from Colossians 3:1, 2 17. "...seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on the earth. And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him."

**Futility of Wealth and Labor Under the Sun**  
**Ecclesiastes 2:1-26**

**Background Notes**

**Doctrinal Points**

**1. Under the sun, pleasure and wealth lead to futility.**

**2. Under the sun, life and labor lead to futility.**

**Practical Application**

**1. Let's look down on life and labor!**

**Questions**

1. What was the purpose of Solomon's efforts and activities as described in verses 1-10?

2. What was Solomon's conclusion regarding the pleasures and wealth in his life?

3. Are the experiences and conclusions of Solomon applicable to those of us who not wealthy or seeking a life full of pleasures?

4. In verse 18, and in verses 22 and 23, what is the message that Solomon has for those whose life is focused solely on worldly pursuits and success?

## Answers

1. The purpose of Solomon's efforts and activities (vs 1-10) was not to pursue a hedonistic life style, but to carry out a planned and purposeful investigation and experiment regarding the real meaning of life. In these verses, Solomon was particularly considering the areas of pleasure and wealth.

2. In spite of Solomon's efforts to gratify his bodily desires (v 3), his achievements of building great gardens (vs 4-6), his possessions and utilization of many servants (v 7), his accumulation of wealth in the form of huge herds of animals (v 7), precious metals and talented entertainers (v 8), and his vaunted reputation and wisdom (v 9), his conclusion was that in all of these things, apart from God ("under the sun"), there is nothing but futility, vanity and lack of profitability (vs 11-14), even a despising of life itself (v 17).

3. In verses 17-23, Solomon makes it clear that the lessons and truths that he had learned are applicable to all people. When anyone looks at life logically and recognizes that there are no guarantees that come with hard work and accumulation of wealth and understands the possibility that foolish or evil people may end up with the profits he has earned, he will come to the point of hating the life of worldly toil.

4. In verses 18, 22 and 23, Solomon points out that a life of hard work does not necessarily bring longer life or better health or peace of mind. This truth applied to Solomon and it applies to everyone today.

## Discuss / Consider

1. Discuss the advantages of learning these lessons about wealth and labor from Solomon rather than having to learn them through your own experiences. Consider the past worldly efforts in your own life that may have caused you to despise life. Discuss means you can employ to help you keep a divine perspective rather than a human perspective on wealth and labor.

## Challenge

1. Are you looking down on life and labor, that is, are you considering your life and your labor from a divine perspective? When you are living a life that pleases God, you will find enjoyment in your life and purpose in your labor. The Lord will even use the hard work and toil of those who are unbelievers to benefit those who are putting Him first in their lives.

**An Appropriate Time for Everything**  
**Ecclesiastes 3:1-13**

**Background Notes**

**Doctrinal Points**

1. There is an appropriate time for everything.

**Practical Application**

1. Do good and enjoy life!

**Questions**

1. Is the main idea of these very familiar verses (1-8), that there is a predetermined time for all events or is the main idea that there is an appropriate time for all the events of life?
2. Do you find a time for any action or event in verses 1-8 that is inappropriate?
3. Solomon's teaching in verse 2a indicates that \_\_\_\_\_ is the one who appoints the birth day and the death day of every person. What impact does this have regarding the life of the unborn and the lives of the terminally ill, injured or elderly?
4. According to verse 3a, there is a time to kill. What would be an appropriate time to take life?
5. What would be an appropriate time to love? What would be an appropriate time to hate?
6. What does the phrase in verse 11 "... He has put eternity in their hearts ... " mean?

## Answers

1. Both ideas are true. God is completely sovereign and is in control of everything, so there is a predetermined time for all events. Also, the Bible teaches that there is an appointed time for everything. See Ephesians 1:11 in this connection. However, the fact that God is sovereign and the truth that there is an appointed time for everything does not contradict or deny human freedom and the responsibility to take appropriate actions at appropriate times.
2. It should be noticed that there is not a time given in these verses for anything inappropriate, such as a time to lie or a time to steal. However, God is sovereign over these kinds of events as well as actions that He does not condone.
3. Solomon's teaching in verse 2a indicates that God is the one who appoints the time of birth and the time of death for every person. Man does not have the authority to take the life of the unborn or to precipitate the death of the terminally ill, the severely injured or the elderly. Preserve and prevent death, yes. Precipitate death, no.
4. According to verse 3a, there is a time to kill or take life. Taking life through capital punishment in a proper system of justice or in the time of a just war would be right and appropriate.
5. Certainly, love between husband and wife in marriage would be one of many appropriate times to love. It is an appropriate time to hate when it is directed against obvious sin and evil.
6. The phrase ". . . He has put eternity in their hearts . . ." in verse 11 means that God has given us a desire to know the meaning of life, what is beyond the grave and how it all fits in with His eternal plans.

## Discuss / Consider

1. Discuss those times and events in your life that are now clear examples of God's perfect timing. Consider especially those times and events when you had seriously doubted God's timing, or even accused Him of poor timing, only to see in retrospect His sovereign and perfect "schedule." Discuss your spiritual growth in this area of trusting God's timing in both the "big" and the "small" events in your life.

## Challenge

1. Are you living a joyful life? If not, what is keeping you from the joy that God intends for you? Is it anxiety, worry, fear or doubt? Pray that God will give you the faith that causes fear, anxiety and doubt to disappear and the faith that grows in hope, certainty, trust and joy.

**A Reason for Everything**  
**Ecclesiastes 3:14-22**

**Background Notes**

**Doctrinal Points**

1. **There is a reason for everything.**

**Practical Application**

1. **Take life one day at a time!**

**Questions**

1. In verses 19 and 20, is the Bible teaching that the fate of people and animals is the same?
2. What is the answer to the rhetorical question in verse 21?
3. In the previous lesson we saw that there is a predetermined time and an appropriate time for everything, and that there should be an appropriate response from us when these appointed times come our way. Why has God designed life this way? Does Solomon discover the answer in the verses of this lesson?
4. In verses 16-18 what answers are found regarding the matter of justice and injustice in the lives of people?

## Answers

1. In verses 19 and 20 the Bible is not teaching that the fate of people and animals is the same. The answer lies in the context of verses 19 and 20, and indeed in the context of the whole book of Ecclesiastes. Solomon is speaking here from the perspective of “under the sun.” Without divine revelation, it does appear that the fate of humans and animals is the same. They all die and return to dust. Only because we have the Bible and divine revelation do we know that there is life after death for humans, but not for animals.
2. The answer to the rhetorical question, “Who knows . . . ?” in verse 21 is that God has revealed to those who believe in Him the knowledge to answer many of the questions of life, particularly the answers about the difference between humans and animals in God’s design of life. The unbeliever has neither the Spirit-given understanding of Scripture nor the interest or insight to discover many of the answers in the wonders of God’s creation.
3. Some of the answers to the question, “Why has God designed life this way?” can be found in this portion of Ecclesiastes 3. First, God has given us the desire to know the meaning of life and the appointed times of life (vs 10-11), which forces us to ask questions about the existence of God and about our relationship to Him. Also, knowing that God has preordained appointed times (v 14) should result in our reverential fear and humble respect when we realize how dependent we are on Him.
4. In verses 16 and 17 we are taught that there will be a time of judgment. In the end, no one will escape from their evil and wicked ways. Also, we see right now that God is allowing unrighteousness to exist as a test (v 18). Without acknowledging God and apart from acknowledging divine revelation, people “are like beasts.”

## Discuss / Consider

1. Discuss the reasons that make it difficult for many believers to have absolute trust in God’s care for the following day. Be honest and open when considering the lack of faith among the group in the very moments of your present discussion. Consider the biblical references that give guidance and answers for growing in the area of trust.

## Challenge

1. A great part of what brings a joyful life without anxiety is trusting God with your tomorrows. Only He knows what will take place in your life tomorrow. Do you trust Him for the appropriate events that He has predetermined for you tomorrow? Do you trust in His sovereignty for tomorrow? “Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you. Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow...” (Matthew 6:33-34)



**Benefits of Contentment and Sharing**  
**Ecclesiastes 4:1-16**

**Background Notes**

**Doctrinal Points**

1. Contentment is better than striving.
2. Sharing is better than loneliness.

**Practical Application**

1. Expect the crowd to be fickle!

**Questions**

1. From chapter 3 we learned that when God's sovereignty is recognized and when we recognize that He has predetermined all events and timed them all appropriately, then the value of labor and the joy of life can be experienced. Here in first verses of chapter 4, Solomon turns again to the perspective "under the sun," with no divine revelation, and describes the evil role of the \_\_\_\_\_ and the impact they have on those under them. With so much oppression in the world, Solomon's conclusion is that \_\_\_\_\_ would be better than \_\_\_\_\_ when there is no acknowledgement of God and His sovereignty.
2. In Solomon's world, he saw two work ethics taking place around him (vs 4-5). What were the two work ethics?
3. When considering the two work ethics, how did Solomon describe a proper balance (v 6)?
4. How would you describe the type of worker who Solomon saw in the workplace and spoke about in verses 7-12? How did the habits of this type of worker compare with the characteristics of workers who have godly values?

## Answers

1. Here in chapter four Solomon again presents the perspective “under the sun” and describes the evil role of oppressors and the terrible impact they have on those under them. For these workers, those who have died, those who are living and those who are yet to live, Solomon concludes that it would be better if they had not lived or would never live, that death would be better than life for them (vs 1-3).
2. Solomon saw the work ethic of the workaholic (v 4), who are out to get as much as they can and to outdo their neighbors with resulting rivalry and jealousy. The other work ethic was that of the sluggards (v 5) who were simply so lazy that they would starve to death rather than work.
3. Solomon describes the proper balance for the worker in verse 6, that is, the characteristic of moderation. The figurative language of one hand full of rest and one hand full of labor conveys balance and moderation resulting in contentment. See 1 Timothy 6:6 in this connection.
4. Another group of workers that Solomon observed (vs 7-12) could be called misers. They work hard but keep everything for themselves. They hoard and do not share with others. They purposely cut off all ties including family and friends, becoming lonely and isolated. In contrast, a godly worker shares with others from his earnings, resulting in kind assistance (v 10), comfort (v 11) and strength and security (v 12). God did not design us to be wealthy hermits. See 1 Timothy 6:17-19 in this connection.

## Discuss / Consider

1. Discuss how you could influence or advise workers around you who are workaholics or sluggards. Consider how you would share the pitfalls of this type of labor/life, and how you would share the values and positive results that come from a life of moderation and contentment. Discuss why moderation and contentment must take place together in a person’s life.

## Challenge

1. Are you frustrated because you do not enjoy success and popularity? Or are you one who depends on your success and popularity? The lessons here in Ecclesiastes would teach us that success and popularity are not worth pursuing because it is a vain and futile pursuit. If attained, success and popularity are fleeting because people are fickle, always looking for someone more successful and popular to follow. Steadfastness and loyalty are rare. Godly characteristics are not found to be the norm. Don’t be discouraged if you are experiencing disappointment right now with people. Expect the crowd to be fickle.

**The Proper View of Religion, Rulers and Riches**  
**Ecclesiastes 5:1-20**

**Background Notes**

**Doctrinal Points**

- 1. Believers should have the right view of religion.**
  
- 2. Believers should have the right view of rulers.**
  
- 3. Believers should have the right view of riches.**

**Practical Application**

- 1. Get the big picture!**

**Questions**

1. In verses 1-3, what is the lesson Solomon presents in regard to our communication with God?
  
2. What is the guidance given in verses 4-6 regarding the making of vows before God? Identify one major vow that is commonly made before God and that God takes very seriously.
  
3. The subject of rulers is covered in verses 8 and 9. What is the advice given in verse 8 regarding our awareness of governmental rulers and their behavior?
  
4. List six of the facts about material riches given in verses 10-17.

## Answers

1. Solomon makes it clear that we should be good and active listeners before God. We should also be careful to limit hasty words when communicating with God.
2. When making vows before God, we should never make a vow and not keep it (v 5), or try to get out of the vow by calling it a mistake (v 6). In our day the vow of marriage is commonly made before God and it is a vow that God takes very seriously. See 1 Corinthians 7:10-16 in this connection.
3. The guidance given regarding governmental leaders is that no matter how many checks and balances are in place to control them, there will still be those leaders who engage in corrupt and oppressive practices. We should not be surprised when we learn of unrighteous leaders.
4. Six facts about material riches given in verses 10-17 are:
  - a. Riches cannot satisfy.
  - b. Riches attract others who would use them and take more time and effort to manage.
  - c. Riches cause worry and anxiety resulting in sleeplessness.
  - d. Riches lead to hoarding which is sinful and hurtful.
  - e. Riches can easily and suddenly disappear.
  - f. Riches must be left behind.

## Discuss / Consider

1. Discuss how you might differentiate between riches that God has given to you and those that you have accumulated and hoarded by your own efforts. Consider the motives that led to the accumulation of your material possessions and how an analysis of these motives may help you determine which riches are from God and which are those that are a result of possible covetousness.

## Challenge

1. Is your life wrapped up in your material possessions? Do they consume your time and labor? Are your financial investments a source of frustration and anxiety? Turn them over to God today and seek His guidance on how to use them or dispose of them. Learn to recognize and gather spiritual and heavenly treasures which will be everlasting, and which will not have to be left behind.

**God Enables and Determines**  
**Ecclesiastes 6:1-12**

**Background Notes**

**Doctrinal Points**

1. You cannot change whatever has already been determined by God.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. You cannot enjoy wealth without being enabled by God.

**Practical Application**

1. Are you willing to pray money away?

**Questions**

1. According to verses 1-7, what is the life experience for the person who acquires wealth and riches but is not enabled by God in the use of it?
  
  
  
  
  
2. Apart from God, does the person who is wise and wealthy have any advantage over the foolish person (v 8)?
  
  
  
  
  
3. What is the lesson for us that Solomon shares in verse 9?
  
  
  
  
  
4. Which attribute of God is recognized in Solomon's teaching in verse 10? Identify a New Testament verse that supports this teaching.
  
  
  
  
  
5. Would God's control over every person be considered as fatalism?

## Answers

1. The life experience for the person who acquires wealth and riches but is not enabled by God in the use of it will be one of frustration because others will consume the wealth (v 2), and it will be one of total futility, even to the point of being worse than not having been born alive (v 3).
2. Apart from God, the wise and wealthy person has no advantage over the foolish person (v 8).
3. In verse 9, we learn that it is better to be content with what we possess i.e., what we can see, rather than constantly striving to fulfill fleshly desires which is futile.
4. Solomon recognizes the attribute of God called omniscience, His knowledge of everything, past, present and future (v 10). This confirms the truth that everything has been predetermined by God. Ephesians 1:11 affirms this truth.
5. God's control of the destiny of every person is not fatalism. Fatalism does not acknowledge God, whereas predetermination relies on God's absolute sovereignty. Nothing man can say will change what God has predetermined (v 10).

## Discuss / Consider

1. Discuss the possible reasons that make it so difficult for the believer to commit all material possessions to the Lord and trust in His management and provision? Consider the areas of trust, dependence, comfort, pride, covetousness, and greed in your discussion.

## Challenge

1. Have you wisely handled the material possessions including money that the Lord has given you? Has the faithful practice of giving generously and increasingly to the Lord's work been difficult for you? Are you willing to pray that the Lord would teach you how to manage your possessions and lead you to be generous in giving, even if it means seeing your possessions decrease? Are you willing to pray your money away?

**God Gives Counsel for Living**  
**Ecclesiastes 7:1-14**

**Background Notes**

**Doctrinal Points**

1. God gives the believer counsel for living but not a blueprint for life.

**Practical Application**

1. Picture your life as a camp fire!

**Questions**

1. The final verses of chapter 6 give us insight into the teachings of chapter 7. Verses 6:10-12 tell us that while God knows everything about our lives, past, present and future, He has not revealed to us every \_\_\_\_\_ of our lives. We do not know what \_\_\_\_\_ will bring.
2. While God does not give us knowledge of all the details of our lives, He does give us counsel and guidance. What insight does He give us in verse 1?
3. How could we apply the wise counsel given to us in verses 2-4 to our lives today?
4. Is rebuke considered a good thing when given by any person (v 5, 6)?
5. What is the meaning of the words “straight” and “crooked” in verse 13, and how are we to respond to these straight and crooked things (v 14)?

## Answers

1. The final verses of chapter 6 give us insight into the sovereignty of God, informing us that he has not revealed to us every detail of our lives and that we do not know what tomorrow will bring.
2. God does not reveal to us every detail of our lives, but He does give us wise counsel and guidance, such as the truth in verse 1 that it is much better to have a lasting good name or reputation than it is to have the passing and temporal pleasant smelling impression.
3. The wise counsel of verses 2-4 can give us understanding that in mourning we are forced to consider seriously the matter of life and death and the reality that life is short and death will surely come. This is better than the superficial laughter of those who consider only the entertaining giddiness of life, rather than the seriousness of its meaning and its brevity.
4. In his wisdom, Solomon says that rebuke or correction is good when it comes from a wise person (v 5), and it is better than listening to the poetic words and laughter of a fool (v 6).
5. What God has made 'crooked' (v 13) refers to difficulties and adversity that God sovereignly allows into our lives. In times like this we should consider and learn the lessons God has for us, and just as in the times of prosperity, we should be thankful to the Lord knowing He has appointed all of the days of our lives.

## Discuss / Consider

1. Discuss ways that you have found to help you faithfully commit every day of the future unto the Lord, and ways that have allowed you to overcome the worry and anxiety of the unknown. Consider the many things about the future that you can know and be sure of that are revealed in God's Word. Share these truths with those in your family and with friends who study the Bible with you.

## Challenge

1. Can you identify those months or years of your Christian life that have been characterized by loss of faith, absence of prayer and Bible study as well as sporadic attendance and minimal service at your church? Are you now committed to avoiding those experiences and enlisting God's enablement to live a full and fruitful spiritual life, a life that will matter in eternity? "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matthew 6:33).



**God Gives Advice for Living**  
**Ecclesiastes 7:15-29**

**Background Notes**

**Doctrinal Points**

1. God gives the believer advice for what to avoid in life.

**Practical Application**

1. Watch out for worldly explanations!

**Questions**

1. The emphasis of God's counsel for living in this portion of chapter 7 is to avoid \_\_\_\_\_ and to practice \_\_\_\_\_.
2. What are some of the negative characteristics that can result from the practice of excessive righteousness (vs 15-18)?
3. In verses 19-22 Solomon gives godly guidelines for those who are unfairly criticized. What is the counsel that he gives regarding a proper response to this criticism?
4. What is the common experience of life that the counsel of verses 23-26 tells us to avoid?
5. In verses 27 and 28 Solomon gives further advice for what to avoid in life. What is it that he teaches us to avoid?

## Answers

1. The emphasis of God's counsel for living in this portion of chapter 7 is to avoid extremes and to practice moderation.
2. Some of the negative characteristics that can result from the practice of excessive righteousness are pharisaical self-righteousness, perfectionism, legalism, hypercriticism and an unforgiving spirit. It can also lead to extreme asceticism.
3. The godly guidelines given for the believer who is unfairly criticized is to avoid revenge. Instead, we should practice self-control and self-restraint because we realize that no one is perfect (v 20), and because we have certainly criticized others unfairly (v 22).
4. The common experience of life that we are counseled to avoid in verses 23-26 is temptation. While acknowledging that wisdom is not easy to attain (vs 23-25), Solomon clearly recognized the reality of temptation even in the life of the wise person and the importance of avoiding it. To yield to temptation is folly and the way of a fool, but to resist temptation is the way of wisdom and is the way of living that pleases God.
5. In verses 27 and 28, Solomon teaches us to avoid "putting people on pedestals." Truly wise and upright people are rare, both men and women, so it is valuable godly guidance to consider people around you with a proper and realistic perspective so that you will not be disappointed if and when they fail.

## Discuss / Consider

1. Discuss the importance of learning not only the right and proper ways of life for the believer, but also the importance of learning those ways of life that are to be avoided. Identify portions of the Bible in both the Old and New Testaments that give specific guidance in these areas. Consider those areas of your own life where changes need to be made in concurrence with the biblical counsel that you discover.

## Challenge

1. Do you pray regularly for the wisdom and insight to properly discern the truths and guidelines for living found in God's Word? Do you quickly recognize as false teachers those who proudly proclaim worldly philosophies? Be diligent in studying the Scriptures, seek out godly counselors and become part of a church body where the Word is spoken truthfully, so that you will be able to consistently discern worldly, erroneous explanations.

**Wisdom Under the Sun – Benefits and Limitations**  
**Ecclesiastes 8:1-17**

**Background Notes**

**Doctrinal Points**

**1. Wisdom under the sun has its benefits.**

**2. Wisdom under the sun has its limitations.**

**Practical Application**

**1. Don't practice Epicureanism based on Ecclesiastes!**

**Questions**

1. In speaking about life, Solomon uses the significant phrase “under the sun” which means life as seen from the human perspective. However, Solomon tells us that even apart from divine revelation, human wisdom does have some \_\_\_\_\_ and does provide certain \_\_\_\_\_ principles on how to govern life.

2. In verses 1-9 some principles for living are given. What are two of them?

3. In speaking about life, Solomon tells us that from the human perspective, “under the sun,” there are \_\_\_\_\_ to wisdom.

4. In verses 10-17, truths about human wisdom apart from divine revelation are given. What are two of them?

## Answers

1. Solomon tells us that even apart from divine revelation human wisdom does have some benefits and does provide certain common sense principles on how to govern life.
2. In verses 1-9 two of the common sense principles provided by human wisdom are: a. When you wisely submit to governing authorities and don't revolt or dispute the word of the ruler, life will go easier for you (vs 2-5). Read Romans 13, Titus 3 and 1 Peter 2 in this connection. b. There is an understanding that there is a time and place for everything (v 6), there is an inability to control the future (vs 7, 8), and there is the truth that what you reap you will also sow (vs 8). Even unbelievers with common sense understand these logical and moral principles that operate in the world "under the sun" where oppression and abuse of power exist (v 9).
3. Solomon tells us that from the human perspective, "under the sun," there are limits to wisdom.
4. In verses 10-17, two of the limitations of human wisdom apart from divine revelation are: a. There are apparent exceptions to the law of retribution (vs 10, 11). The wicked get honorable burials and their wickedness is forgotten. This course of events only encourages more evil. Only when we realize that in the end the wicked will be judged and the righteous will be rewarded (vs 12-13), does this make sense. This conclusion, however, requires wisdom from "above the sun." b. There is an inability to comprehend the ways of God. God has purposely hidden and not revealed all of life's mysteries (Ecclesiastes 3:11), so it certainly stands to reason that no matter how hard a person "under the sun" tries to understand the enigma and mysteries of life, and regardless of how wise a person is "under the sun," that person will never understand the ways of God. See Romans 11:33 and Isaiah 55:9 in this connection.

## Discuss / Consider

1. Discuss the possible or probable reasons that believers often find it difficult to understand the limitations to human wisdom and why they often find it difficult to rely confidently on divine wisdom. Consider the impact of a faulty prayer life or the absence of a serious study of God's Word.

## Challenge

1. During the times in your life when you were not trusting in the Lord and were not seeking His wisdom, were you aware of the limitations of your own human wisdom? Did you wonder about the very purpose of your existence? Now is the time to turn to God, earnestly seek His wisdom and He will answer your prayer (James 1:5). He will allow you to understand all that has been revealed in His Holy Word.

**Keeping the Joy of Living**  
**Ecclesiastes 9:1-18**

**Background Notes**

**Doctrinal Points**

- 1. Man's limited knowledge should not diminish a believer's joy of living.**
- 2. Man's limited knowledge should not diminish a believer's dedication for work.**
- 3. Man's limited knowledge should not diminish a believer's appreciation of wisdom.**

**Practical Application**

- 1. Don't be surprised if people forget you!**

**Questions**

1. In review, what are the two major points to keep in mind when studying the book of Ecclesiastes? What conclusion can we draw regarding life as Solomon presents it?
2. In verse 1 of chapter 9, Solomon uses the phrase, "all this." What is Solomon referring to?
3. In verses 1-9, Solomon makes it clear that man has limited knowledge. What would be an improper response to this truth? What would be a proper response?
4. Solomon gives advice concerning work in verse 10. Is this good advice?
5. What is the lesson that Solomon teaches us about wisdom in verses 13-18?

## Answers

1. When studying Ecclesiastes, keep in mind that the complete theme of the book: While life and labor under the sun without God in the picture are meaningless, life and labor received with God in the picture and viewed from His perspective from above the sun and from what He has revealed to us in Scripture, can be a life of joy and meaning. Also keep in mind that in the structure of the book, Solomon includes the divine perspective from above the sun throughout the book, not just in the final chapter. Solomon's conclusion is that life can be lived joyously because it is a gift from God. See chapters 2, 3, 5 and 8.
2. The phrase "all this" that Solomon uses in verse 1 of chapter 9 refers to the teachings in the second half of chapter 8 – that the ways of God are beyond human wisdom. Verse 8:17 confirms that although God has complete control and knows all, He has designed His moral universe in a way that is beyond human wisdom.
3. While God has designed His universe in such a way that mankind has limited knowledge, we should not be discouraged or demoralized. We should understand that with divine approval we can live life under the sun joyously, because life is a gift of the Creator and Controller of all things.
4. In the positive view of Ecclesiastes which we are presenting, verse 10 is good advice. Just as our limited knowledge should not diminish our joy of living, so our limited knowledge should not diminish our dedication for work. Whatever area of work or service the Lord sovereignly gives us in this life, we should use all of our abilities and capabilities to do the work to the best of our ability.
5. The wisdom lesson taught by Solomon in verses 13-18 is that we should learn to appreciate wisdom. Even though it is not always heeded and is limited, quiet words of wisdom are better than the shouting of a ruler with authority, and wisdom is better than military strength.

## Discuss / Consider

1. Discuss areas where human knowledge, even for the believer, is clearly limited and identify those areas where human knowledge, while still limited, is greater for the believer who is instructed by the Holy Spirit in the Scripture. Consider those areas of knowledge where you have grown through Bible study during the last year.

## Challenge

1. Have your sacrificial good deeds been forgotten by those who you served and those around you? Have you expected to receive the praise of men and been disappointed? Your faithful and authentic service to the Lord will be remembered and rewarded. People may forget you, but the Lord will not. Ephesians 6:7-8 says, "Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men, because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free."

**Works and Words of the Fool**  
**Ecclesiastes 10:1-20**

**Background Notes**

**Doctrinal Points**

1. The works of a fool defeat the value of wisdom.

2. The words of a fool defeat the value of wisdom.

**Practical Application**

1. Don't let your conversations go downhill!

**Questions**

1. The full conclusion for the believer from the book of Ecclesiastes could be stated as follows: \_\_\_\_\_ God, keep His \_\_\_\_\_, live \_\_\_\_\_ and remember the \_\_\_\_\_.

2. What is the lesson regarding wisdom found in verse 1 of chapter 10?

3. What is the more modern way of stating the truth taught in ancient language in verse 11?

4. Describe the words of wisdom and the words of a fool as taught in verses 12-15.

5. The foolish person can be characterized or described in what terms (vs 16-19)?

## Answers

1. The full conclusion for the believer from the book of Ecclesiastes could be stated as follows: Fear God, keep His commandments, live joyously and remember the judgment.
2. The lesson regarding wisdom in verse 1 is that it does not take much folly to nullify the hard earned benefits of wisdom. We see this lesson repeated in verses 3 and 5-7.
3. A phrase used today which captures the meaning of the ancient phrase, "A serpent may bite when it is not charmed" is "When the horse is stolen it is too late to lock the barn." These words reinforce the lesson that it does not take much folly, or foolish works, to nullify the benefits and value of wisdom.
4. The words of wisdom can be described as gracious and few while the words of the fool are endless, worthless, shortsighted and ignorant (vs 12-15).
5. The foolish person can be described as inexperienced (v 10), frequent drunkenness (v 17), negligence (v 17) and laziness (v 18).

## Discuss / Consider

1. Consider those people in your workplace or in your church who are consistent in demonstrating wisdom in their speech and in their service. Identify specific, positive results that flow from their words and works. Graciously discuss examples of people in leadership positions in your community who consistently demonstrate quick and foolish words, spoken or written. Consider the negative impact of their actions in the community.

## Challenge

1. Have you found that others in your circle of friends often lead conversations into areas that display ignorance, shallowness and shortsightedness, or are you the one who directs conversations in this direction? As a believer, make it a practice to follow the guidance of Colossians 4:6: *"Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one."*



**Diligence in Uncertainty**  
**Ecclesiastes 11:1-10**

**Background Notes**

**Doctrinal Points**

1. Believers should work hard even though the future is uncertain.
  
2. Believers should enjoy life because the prime of life is fleeting.

**Practical Application**

1. Apply the principles of Ecclesiastes 11 to spreading the Gospel!

**Questions**

1. List four facts about life that we would not and could not know apart from God-given revelation from His Word.
  
2. In the book of Ecclesiastes, Solomon teaches us that we should live our lives joyously. However, in doing so, we should remember three important lessons. List them.
  
3. What is the primary lesson Solomon is teaching in verses 1-6 regarding a believer's work?
  
4. What particular lesson is Solomon teaching in verse 4 regarding a believer's work?
  
5. In verse 8, Solomon refers to people who live to an old age. What is he teaching them?

## Answers

1. Apart from the divine revelation that God has given us in the Bible, we would not know that:

- a. There is life after death.
- b. There is a heaven and a hell.
- c. There is a purpose for living.
- d. How life began.

2. While living our lives joyously, we should remember that: a. Life is a gift of God and that we should live our lives to please Him, not ourselves. b. Life is short, so we should take advantage of the days the Lord has given us. c. While God in His sovereign grace has given us divine revelation, He has not revealed everything to us.

3. The primary lesson Solomon is teaching in verses 1-6 is that even though our knowledge is limited, we should still work hard. Not knowing the details of the future should not cause us to stop working hard today.

4. In verse 4, Solomon teaches us that we should not always wait for ideal conditions before we begin our work. Those who wait for perfect weather conditions before they plow and plant, will never reap.

5. In verse 8, Solomon is teaching people who live to an old age the same lesson he teaches those who are younger: the remaining days of life may be short and the darkness of death may be right around the corner, so live life joyously and for the glory of God.

## Discuss / Consider

1. Discuss the many advantages of having a diligent and consistent work ethic in your profession, vocation and in your home. Consider the necessity of good work habits in the application of the spiritual gift(s) God has given each believer for use in the church body.

## Challenge

1. Have you made a concerted effort to share the wonderful Word of God with others? Have you been waiting and waiting for the ideal moment to share your faith with the unbeliever you work with each day? Take the words of 2 Timothy 4:2 seriously, and "Preach the Word! Be ready in season and out of season."

## **Remembering Your Creator** **Ecclesiastes 12:1-7**

### **Background Notes**

### **Doctrinal Points**

- 1. Remember your Creator before the storm gathers.**
- 2. Remember your Creator before the mill shuts down.**
- 3. Remember your Creator before the equipment fails.**

### **Practical Application**

- 1. Stay young for your Creator!**

### **Questions**

1. In the previous lesson, we listed three things that believers should remember while living joyous lives before God. Here in verse 1 of chapter 12, Solomon teaches us something else that we should remember. What is it? Give two reasons why this is important to remember.
2. In verses 1-7, Solomon uses three vivid figures or pictures to describe the coming of old age. Describe the first one (v 2) and give a brief explanation of its meaning.
3. Describe the second vivid figure Solomon uses (v 3) and give its meaning.
4. Describe the third vivid figure Solomon uses (v 6) and give its meaning.

## Answers

1. While living our lives joyously, we must remember our Creator in the days of our youth. This does not just mean to recall some facts about Him, but to remember to obey and serve Him! One reason that this is important is that it serves as a safeguard against practicing joyous living to the wrong extreme, such as over indulgence. Another reason for remembering our Creator is the fact that life is short and if we fail to remember God in our youth, perhaps He would not be remembered until it is too late to serve Him.
2. The first picture or illustration Solomon uses to describe the coming of old age is the gathering storm (v 2). Here, life is likened to light and death likened to darkness. The light of life is short and the darkness of death is always near. As a person gets older, the recurring clouds return with increasing frequency, picturing the weakening abilities and strength characteristic of the later years.
3. The second illustration Solomon uses to describe the coming of old age is the breaking down of the old house or mill (v 3-4). As in old age, the work becomes slowed, backs of the workers become bowed, the eyes are dimmed and straining muscles tremble.
4. The third picture used by Solomon is the loosened cord, the broken bowl, the shattered pitcher, or the broken pulley (v 6). Here, aging bodies are pictured as pieces of equipment breaking and failing, no longer able to be used as productive implements or vessels. Even the desire of the aged dims (v 5), and progress is slowed to the speed of a grasshopper (v 5).

## Discuss / Consider

1. Discuss the possible reasons that Solomon used the description of God as Creator in this chapter. Consider the connection of God as creator in this chapter of Ecclesiastes with the controversial discussions among believers and unbelievers regarding creation and evolution going on today. Discuss God's particular acts during the creation week and how they relate to the importance of believers' remembrance of God as Creator.

## Challenge

1. Have you thought about the number of years of life you have left to serve the Lord? Has the illness of a friend or the death of a loved one reminded you that your life may be shortened? Whether you are still in your youth or in middle age or even in the later years of your life, commit your life to the Lord now, and allow Him to use it effectively and fruitfully. Don't let your body and your life become weak and unusable. Stay young for your Creator!

**Final Authority and Advice**  
**Ecclesiastes 12:8-14**

**Background Notes**

**Doctrinal Points**

1. Ecclesiastes concludes with the author's authority.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Ecclesiastes concludes with some final advice.

**Practical Application**

1. Base your life on goads and nails!
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Read critically!

**Questions**

1. The perspective of Ecclesiastes that has been presented in these lessons considers this book of the Bible as the \_\_\_\_\_ record of what Solomon reasoned and that his reasoning is accurate and \_\_\_\_\_. This perspective is taken in the context that Solomon, the inspired \_\_\_\_\_, sometimes writes from the viewpoint of "under the sun", that is, how things appear to be \_\_\_\_\_ divine revelation, and that Solomon at other times writes from the viewpoint of "above the sun", that is, the way things really are when \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ are taken into account.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. The words of verses 9-11 are another strong indication that \_\_\_\_\_ is the Preacher and the \_\_\_\_\_ of Ecclesiastes. What connection is there with the other Old Testament written by this person?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. Who is the person referred to by Solomon as "one Shepherd" in verse 11?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. Why does Solomon describe the words of the wise as goads and the words of scholars as well-driven nails?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. Describe briefly the final advice given by Solomon in verses 13 and 14.

## Answers

1. The perspective of Ecclesiastes that has been presented in these lessons considers this book of the Bible as the inspired record of what Solomon reasoned and that his reasoning is accurate and correct. This perspective is taken in the context that Solomon sometimes writes from the viewpoint of “under the sun”, that is, how things appear to be without divine revelation, and that Solomon at other times writes from the viewpoint of “above the sun”, that is, the way things really are when God and His Word are taken into account.
2. The words of verses 9-11 are another strong indication that Solomon is the Preacher and the author of Ecclesiastes. The references to his wisdom (v 9), his setting out many proverbs (v 9), his words being words of truth (v 10), and his use of wise words (v 11), all point to Solomon and his authorship of the book of Proverbs.
3. Solomon does not refer to himself as the Shepherd. When he uses the adjective “one” in describing the shepherd, it is a good indication that Solomon was referring to the Lord Himself. Most translations indicate this by capitalizing the “S” of Shepherd.
4. Solomon uses the term “goad” to describe God’s words of wisdom, because one purpose of them is to goad us into right action, just as a goad directed oxen into the right direction. Solomon used the term “nails” as a further description because the words of wisdom of Scripture are like well-driven nails in that they give stability to life. They hold life together.
5. The final advice Solomon gives to his readers in verses 13 and 14 is that we should accept the life that God has given to us and live it joyously and make the most of every opportunity. In doing so, we should fear God, that is, honor Him and revere Him and serve Him. Also, we should remember that our lives will be judged by God Himself, the hidden things and both the good and the bad things in our lives.

## Discuss / Consider

1. Discuss the several ways that Solomon secured his authorship and authority in the final verses of this book of the Bible. When recognizing the many different viewpoints of the structure and teachings of Ecclesiastes, consider the importance of these final words of chapter 12.

## Challenge

1. When you read the Bible, do you accept it as the truth? And when you read other books, do you read them critically, using care to discern truth and error? Constantly compare and test what you read with the truth of Scripture! Read critically!